Human rights work 'in survival mode': UN official

GENEVA: The United Nations warned on Monday that human rights work globally is fighting for its survival, as funding woes and rollbacks of accountability laws limit the ability to address widespread abuses.

UN rights chief Volker Turk said his office, which is among a slew of international organisations hit by a global funding crisis, was "on its knees".

"The entire human rights ecosystem is in survival mode," he told a meeting of the UN's business and human rights forum in Geneva.

The UN as a whole is mulling reforms, including a 15 per cent cut across its budget, to tackle chronic liquidity problems exacerbated by US President Donald Trump's policies.

The United States, the UN's biggest contributor, paused funding after Trump returned to power in January.

Funding for the UN's human rights work has long been chronically underfunded, and the cuts now being discussed could take a particularly heavy toll on the UN rights office.

The agency has received just 73 per cent of member states' promised regular budget contributions for 2025, leaving $67 million unpaid, after already seeing tens of millions of dollars in US voluntary funds evaporate this year.

Turk said he welcomed "creative, innovative ideas on how to increase support for us".

"For example, payroll-giving initiatives are one practical tool for companies to help sustain the institutions that protect us all," he said.

Beyond financial support, he said his office was working to create a "global alliance for human rights".

This, he said, should be "a cross-regional coalition of states, businesses, civil society, philanthropists, and others (aimed to) put human rights at the heart of public and political life".

Turk insisted on the need to shore up rights protection in a world facing towering challenges.

He highlighted violations linked to the private sector.

He slammed "unacceptable" attacks against "courageous human rights defenders shining a light on business-related abuses".—AFP

Xi, Trump discuss Taiwan in phone call

BEIJING: Chinese leader Xi Jinping and US President Donald Trump discussed bilateral cooperation and the issue of Taiwan in a phone call on Monday, Beijing's state news agency *Xinhua* reported.

Xi told Trump the two countries should "maintain momentum in ties", according to *Xinhua*, after a meeting last month in South Korea where the two leaders sought to ease a blistering trade war.

Xi also "stressed that Taiwan's return to China is an important part of the post-war international order".

Trump and Xi met last month for the first time since 2019, engaging in closely-watched talks as the world's top two economies have remained locked in a trade war.

The tussle between Washington and Beijing, which encompasses everything from rare earths to soybeans and port fees, has rocked markets.

Xi told Trump that the "successful" meeting in South Korea "helped calibrate the course and inject momentum into the steady forward movement of the giant ship of China-US relations". Since the meeting, China-US ties have "remained stable and have continued to improve, which has been widely welcomed by both countries and the international community", Xi added.—AFP

WOMEN carrying pots walk along the parched shores of a river to fetch drinking water at Parshemari village, in Bangladesh's Khulna district.—AFP

US, Ukraine try to bridge gaps on peace plan

KYIV: Ukrainian and US officials sought on Monday to narrow the gaps between them over a plan to end the war in Ukraine, after agreeing to modify a US proposal that Kyiv and its European allies saw as a Kremlin wish list.

In a joint statement, Washington and Kyiv said they had drafted a "refined peace framework" after talks in Geneva on Sunday. Though there were no specifics, the dialogue received a cautious welcome from some of Ukraine's allies.

Ukraine's delegation to the talks with US officials in Switzerland returned home on Monday to report back, President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

President Donald Trump hinted at new progress.

"Is it really possible that big progress is being made in peace talks between Russia and Ukraine??? Don't believe it until you see it, but something good just may be happening," Trump wrote on *Truth Social*.

Kyiv blindsided

The US blindsided Kyiv and European countries with its 28-point peace plan last week, giving Ukraine until Thursday (Nov 27) to agree to a framework to end Europe's deadliest war since World War Two.

The plan would require Kyiv to cede more territory, accept curbs on its military and bar it from ever joining Nato, conditions Kyiv has long rejected as tantamount to surrender.

Ukraine's European allies drew up a counter-proposal which would halt fighting at present front lines, leaving discussions of territory for later, and include a Nato-style US security guarantee for Ukraine.

Moscow rejects European plan

Moscow, which has described the initial reported US plan as a potential basis for a peace agreement, rejected the European version.

"The European plan, at first glance... is completely unconstructive and does not work for us," Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov told reporters in Moscow.

The sudden US push raises the pressure on Ukraine and Zelensky, who is now at his most vulnerable since the start of the war after a corruption scandal saw two of his ministers dismissed and as Russia makes battlefield gains.

Zelensky could struggle to get Ukrainians to swallow a deal viewed as selling out their interests.

"Trump's special plan is, in general, a capitulation for Ukraine," said Anzhelika Yurkevych, a 62-year-old civil servant in Kyiv. "I think the Ukrainian people will not agree. Even if they sign, it needs to be implemented, the Ukrainian people will be the ones to do it. And they do not agree with this."

After Sunday's talks, no public statement was released on how the revised plan would handle contentious issues such as how to guarantee Ukraine's security against future Russian threats, or how to fund the rebuilding of Ukraine. Zelenskiy said negotiations were ongoing.

Kyiv still looking for compromise

"We all continue working with partners, especially the United States, to look for compromises that will strengthen but not weaken us," Zelensky said via video link from a separate meeting of Ukraine's allies in Sweden.

Trump, who returned to office this year pledging to quickly end the war, has reoriented US policy away from staunch support for Kyiv towards accepting some of Russia's justifications for its 2022 invasion.

Zelensky could travel to the United States as soon as this week to discuss the most sensitive aspects of the plan with Trump, according to sources familiar with the matter.

Ukraine's second-largest city Kharkiv was hit by what officials said was a massive drone attack that killed four people on Sunday. With smoke rising from the rubble, one man was seen crouched and holding the hand of a dead body.

"There was a family, there were children," said Ihor Klymenko, Red Cross chief of the emergency-response team in Kharkiv. "I can't tell you how, but the children are alive, thank God, the man is alive. The woman died, unfortunately."

Across the border, Russian air defences downed Ukrainian drones en route to Moscow, forcing three airports serving the capital to pause flights.

A reported Ukrainian drone strike on Sunday knocked power out for thousands of residents near Moscow, a rare reversal of Russian attacks on energy targets that regularly cause power blackouts for millions of Ukrainians.

Some EU leaders met to discuss Ukraine on the sidelines of an EU-African Union summit in Luanda on Monday.—Reuters

Rising seas swallowing low-lying areas in Bangladesh

KHULNA: On Bangladesh's coast, where mighty Himalayan rivers meet the sea, water defines every rhythm of life, and every struggle.

Rising seas driven by climate change are swallowing low-lying areas, while stronger storms push saltwater further inland, turning wells and lakes brackish, according to government scientists.

For the millions living in the ecologically sensitive deltas of mudflats and mangrove forests, finding clean drinking water has become an escalating challenge.

Cyclone Aila in 2009 was a turning point.

Embankments broke and saltwater swept inland, flooding not only homes, but seeping into once-fertile land.

The water that once sustained communities became undrinkable, and the land began to crack under layers of salt.

The people of Khulna and Satkhira districts today live in a fragile balancing act between land and sea.

Many families live in houses built on bamboo stilts to escape tidal floods.

Children bathe in yellow, saline water and grow up in a landscape of constant change, where rivers erode their homes and schools, and displacement has become the norm.

Men migrate for months seeking work.

Ritual of endurance

Women and children walk for hours across parched, cracked soil to fetch water from distant ponds, or harvest rainwater, and store it in tanks supplied by charities.

Each household stores a few thousand litres, rationed carefully until the next monsoon arrives.

The daily act of collecting and storing water has become a quiet ritual of endurance.—AFP

Nigeria moves to bolster security partnership with US

LAGOS: Nigerian authorities announced on Monday the country had strengthened its "security partnership" with the United States, while again rejecting accusations of targeted persecution against Christians in the west African country.

The announcement follows US President Donald Trump's threats of military intervention over allegations that anti-government fighters in Nigeria were "killing the Christians and killing them in very large numbers".

A Nigerian delegation, headed by the national security adviser, visited Washington last week to to discuss their concerns.

"Following these engagements, the United States government affirmed its readiness to deepen security cooperation with Nigeria," said the statement from Bayo Onanuga, special adviser to the Nigerian president.

He specified that the cooperation includes enhanced intelligence support, expedited processing of defence equipment requests and the "potential provision of excess defence articles".

Religiously diverse Nigeria is the scene of a number of long-brewing conflicts that have killed both Christians and Muslims, often indiscriminately.—AFP

Disputed Gaza aid distributor, backed by US and Israel, ends operations

TEL AVIV: The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, the US- and Israeli-backed organisation to distribute aid in Gaza, said on Monday it was ending its operations after months of criticism over deaths of hundreds of Palestinians trying to reach GHF hubs.

The GHF, which had bypassed the United Nations and long-established aid agencies to distribute food, upsetting European leaders, made the announcement weeks after suspending its operations following the Oct 10 ceasefire in Gaza.

The GHF started distributing food to needy Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in late May. Most of its sites were located in southern Gaza, away from much of the population.

That forced Palestinians to walk long distances to collect aid. Hundreds of Palestinians were shot dead near its sites when they first opened, with the Israeli military saying it had opened fire on Palestinians approaching soldiers.

Executive Director John Acree said in a statement that a US-led multinational coordination centre in Israel overseeing President Donald Trump's plan to end the conflict would be "adopting and expanding the model" that the GHF had piloted.

"As a result, we are winding down our operations as we have succeeded in our mission of showing there's a better way to deliver aid to Gaza," he said.

The foundation started supplying aid in Gaza nearly three months after Israel imposed a blockade on all goods entering the enclave. A famine was later declared in parts of Gaza.

'No reliable partner'

Austrian Foreign Minister Beate Meinl-Reisinger, speaking in Jerusalem in June alongside her Israeli counterpart, told reporters that the GHF was not a reliable partner.

The Trump administration provided tens of millions of dollars to finance GHF operations, but the organisation otherwise repeatedly refused to say who else had funded it. Last month, it said it had enough funds to operate until the end of November.

In recent months, the GHF had unsuccessfully asked U.N. agencies to use its sites to hand out aid.

The GHF's future had been uncertain ever since Trump announced his 20-point plan to end the two-year conflict. A clause in that plan says that "institutions associated in any manner with either" Hamas or Israel would not take part in aid distribution.

US State Department deputy spokesperson Tommy Pigott thanked GHF in a post on X, in which he said the organisation had shared with the US and partners valuable lessons learned.

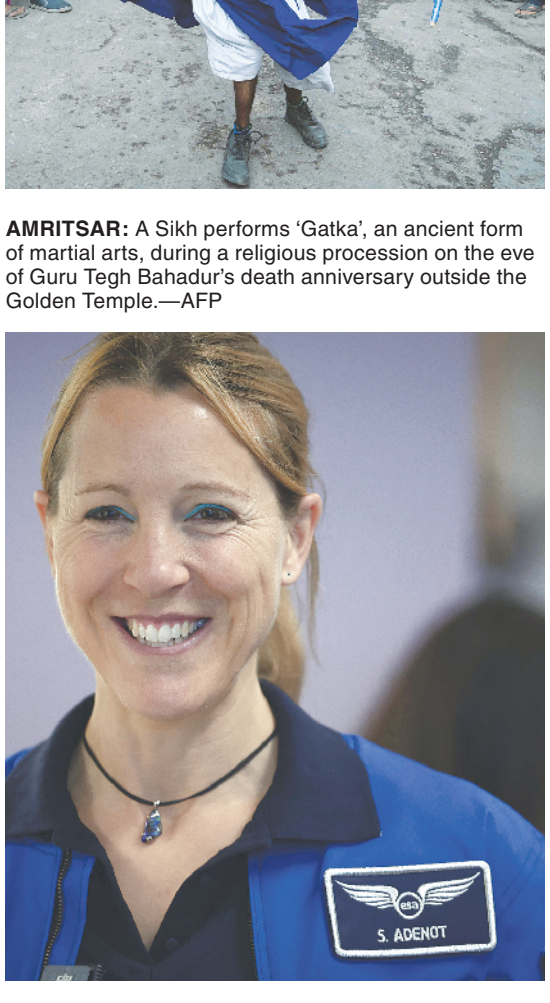
Hamas, however, welcomed its closure and called for the organisation to be prosecuted for crimes against Palestinians.

The foundation halted operations in Gaza as the Oct 10 ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came into effect, but had repeatedly framed the suspension as only temporary.

On Monday, it said that it had delivered 187 million meals since starting operations nearly six months ago, on average less than a meal a day relative to Gaza's two million Palestinians.—Reuters

NEWSMAKERS

AMRITSAR: A Sikh performs 'Gatka', an ancient form of martial arts, during a religious procession on the eve of Guru Tegh Bahadur's death anniversary outside the Golden Temple.—AFP



TOULOUSE: French astronaut Sophie Adenot attends a press conference regarding her departure for the International Space Station slated for next year.—AFP

JAMAICAN singer Jimmy Cliff performs during a festival in this Aug 2014 file picture.—AFP

Reggae music pioneer Jimmy Cliff dies

KINGSTON: Jimmy Cliff, the legendary Jamaican singer who along with Bob Marley popularised reggae, ska and rock-steady music over a six-decade career, died on Sunday aged 81.

The cause was a seizure followed by pneumonia.

Born James Chambers on July 30, 1944, during a hurricane in St James Parish, Jamaica, he moved in the 1950s from the family farm to the country's capital Kingston with his father, determined to succeed in the music industry.

At just 14 he became nationally famous for the

song *Hurricane Hattie*, which he wrote.

Cliff would go on to record over 30 albums and perform all over the world, including in Paris, in Brazil and at the World Fair, an international exhibition held in New York in 1964.

The following year, Island Records' Chris Blackwell, the producer who launched Bob Marley and the Wailers, invited Cliff to work with him in Britain.

Cliff later went into acting, starring in the 1972 classic film *The Harder They Come*, directed by Perry Henzell, which introduced an international audience to reggae music. The movie portrayed the grittier aspects of Jamaican life, redefining the island as more than a tourist playground of cocktails, beaches and waterfalls.

"When I've achieved all my ambitions, then I guess that I will have done it and I can just say 'great'," he said in a 2019 interview, as he was losing his sight.

Known in part for singles *You Can Get It If You Really Want It* and *Many Rivers To Cross*, as well as for his covers of Johnny Nash's *I Can See Clearly Now*, which appeared on the soundtrack of the 1993 movie, *Cool Runnings*, and Cat Stevens *Wild World*, Cliff was a prolific writer who weaved his humanitarian views into his songs.—Reuters

PARIS: Chefs awarded by elite digital gastronomy guide *La Liste* pose during a photo session. Created in 2015, the guide aims to be the "ranking of rankings", listing 1,000 restaurants worldwide and tracking 38,000 establishments using an algorithm that compiles more than 1,100 sources.—AFP

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan with his South Korean counterpart Lee Jae Myung during a welcoming ceremony at the presidential complex.—AFP